

NEW BOOKS.

Brunelleschi.
The latest addition to "The Great Masters in Painting and Sculpture" series is the volume on Brunelleschi. This is the biography of a man who is known to posterity not at all as a painter, and scarcely at all as a sculptor, but almost exclusively as an architect. Only one effort of Brunelleschi's painting is vaguely chronicled, and the only existing specimen of his drawings is a rough note, preserved in the Uffizi Gallery, of the proportion of the arches of the chapel in San Lorenzo. As proof of his merit in sculpture, we have two silver half-figures of prophets on the super-altar at Pistoja; a crucifix carved in wood, preserved in the church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence, and a design of the "Sacrifice of Isaac," modelled and cast in bronze by him in unsuccessful competition for the projected doors of the Baptistery. It was the preference given to Ghiberti's design on this occasion that caused Brunelleschi to turn his back upon sculpture and to study architecture amid the ruins of ancient master-works in Rome. It was from the single-roofed Pantheon that he evolved the double cupola of Florence.

Even for an estimate of Brunelleschi's architectural achievements the extant materials are not commensurate with the reputation which he attained among his contemporaries and proximate successors. Mr. Scott recalls that his designs were changed, even in the hands that continued them on his death, and that his buildings were restored, as the process was called, by subsequent architects, who inserted in them incongruous bits. The result is that, except the Pazzi Chapel, and the old sacristy of San Lorenzo which Brunelleschi finished during his lifetime, there is not another work of his by which a modern critic can form an altogether adequate idea of his designs. The works by which he is best known in ecclesiastical architecture are, first, of course, the great dome, or cupola, of the Florence Cathedral, the largest that had been, till then, attempted. This cupola was not only designed by Brunelleschi, but built under his superintendence without scaffolding, except quite at the top, and entirely without centering. It occupied him from 1417, when he was 40 years old, till his death in 1446. His part of the building began with the octagonal tribune and ended with the base of the lantern. Next should be mentioned the fine classic church of San Lorenzo, which is of basilica form and of noble proportions; this was designed and almost finished by Brunelleschi. It is, however, the Church of Santo Spirito, begun by Brunelleschi, but finished from his designs, which is accounted the architect's masterpiece in this department of his art. In civil architecture the Pazzi Palace, now Quaratesi, in Florence, is one of the few buildings in which Brunelleschi's work is to a large extent preserved. It is a beautiful ornate Tuscan style and has large double-light, arched windows with sculptured mouldings. Of the Pitti Palace only the central portion is Brunelleschi's work. In military architecture, but little evidence of Brunelleschi's capacity survives. In the Castle San Giorgio at Mantua, which was either built or restored by him, the general style is unchanged, though the castle has since been altered and modernized.

In spite, however, of the difficulty of estimating an architect's genius in comparison with the ease of recognizing a sculptor's, it is certain that Brunelleschi's service to architecture can hardly be overrated. He found architecture languishing and rapidly sinking into a mere mechanical art in the hands of a guild which had once been a creator of noble Italian-Gothic structures, but which had lost its former vitality. Perceiving it to be useless to continue longer in the grooves of the building guild, Brunelleschi was led by his studies in Rome entirely to purge architecture of medievalism, and to go back to the classic purity of style. Mr. Scott points out, moreover, that a real Brunelleschi edifice differs as much from the buildings of the later Renaissance masters of the sixteenth century as it does from the Italian-Gothic of his contemporaries. One may be sure never to find a false line or an unscientific design by him. The strongest mark of his architecture is truth, the truth of a line to its object, the truth of form to its meaning. While, however, his own choice of style was severe and simple, he was unbigoted, and when the work was a question of mere restoration he always respected older styles, and avoided a visible clash.

Besides the lesson of truth, Brunelleschi left to the world of art another legacy, that, namely, of individuality. All preceding works of architecture in the Middle Ages seem to have been collective, so to speak, the builders of the parts being separate members of a congregated body. They might put their original ideas and fantasies into their own part of the work, but the individual artists were lost in the congregated merit of the entire edifice. Thus we hear vaguely that Arnolfo began the Duomo, that Giotto and others went on with it, but the names of the sculptors and designers of the separate parts can seldom be ascertained. So on all the early Roman and Tuscan buildings, where there is any description at all, it usually records the name of the patron, or ruling superintendent, but very infrequently the artist's. After Brunelleschi's stroke for freedom, on the other hand, artists dared to stand alone, and the builders of the Renaissance came out as separate men whose distinctive minds are impressed on their buildings. Michelozzi, Alberti, Michelangelo, are all individual artists whose achievements are the outcome of their own independent conceptions. The gain, as Mr. Scott points out, was homogeneity in the buildings, but in the individualistic system something was lost of the infinite variety and freedom of imagination which the collective system possessed.

The author of this book answers in the negative the question whether the Italian-Gothic would have held its way, if Brunelleschi had not turned the popular taste toward a classic revival. The classic revival was in the air, and if Brunelleschi had not made the first step toward it, it would have been made by the painter, who, standing on his own feet, in the classic direction, however, applied the classic principles to architecture on the purest possible terms, and Mr. Scott believes that if Alberti and the other builders had followed his lead, the Italian Renaissance would have been far richer than it is.

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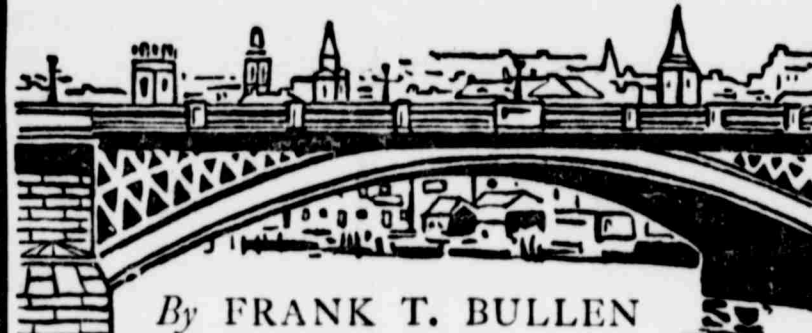
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Continued on Eighth Page.

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